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ABSTRACT

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF THIS DOCUMENT: At my university, students are required to take a two course sequence in freshman composition, EH 101 and EH 102. EH 101 covers six basic essay forms utilizing description, narration, process description, classification, comparison/contrast, and argument. Because EH 101 is a basic, required course, instructors often find it difficult to generate interest in the classroom. Students with extensive writing experience in high school are bored by a review of basic grammar and essay format. Students who are less well-prepared are confused by the avalanche of rules and forms which instructors are required to cover. Consequently, freshman composition students are apt for different reasons to regard writing assignments as a chore, an unwelcome exercise towards fulfilling a requirement. And, as all instructors know, lack of interest fosters poor writing. Although one way to combat writing fatigue is to allow students to write on topics of their choice, I always specify the topic for the argument essay, the final writing assignment in EH 101. My topic always excites the greatest interest and effort from my students. After covering the basic format for an argument essay and discussing several examples from the textbook, I ask students to write down the grade they would like to get in the course and the grade they expect to get. Inevitably, the second grade is lower than the first grade. Classroom discussion reveals that the second grade is generally equivalent to the average grade received on the various essays written up-to-date whereas the first grade is based on more subjective reasoning. With some helpful prodding from me, students begin to articulate the basis for their claims. They discover that progressive improvement, classroom participation, and voluntary attendance at the Writing Laboratory might be considered before an overall course grade is assigned by the instructor. Further discussion elicits the idea that the individual letter grade on an essay can be misleading, for all aspects of an essay are not necessarily of the same quality. For example, failing grades on compositions may result from the consistent inclusion of numerous run-on sentences, although these same compositions might demonstrate increased proficiency in spelling, punctuation, or idea development. Students are asked to review their written work for the course and note areas of improvement as well as writing weaknesses. Then they are told that their final graded assignment will be an argument essay, the thesis for which will read, "I should receive a [letter grade] for EH 101 because... " This essay must be accompanied by a file of their course work so that I can review the "evidence" upon which they are basing their argument. The exercise serves a twofold purpose. First, students gain experience in writing an argument essay. Second, students are forced to evaluate their course work objectively, recognizing overall development as well as specific strengths and weaknesses. This self-evaluation results in their acknowledging what purpose EH 101 has served. And, knowing what areas still need to be improved, they bring definite goals and motivation to EH 102. An added benefit for the EH 101 instructor is that rarely do students who have performed such a self-evaluation question the final course grade they do receive. (Author)

An Idea for Argumentative Writing

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ED241923

Level:

College freshman composition classes

Author's Comment:

At my university, students are required to take a two course sequence in freshman composition, EH 101 and EH 102. EH 101 covers six basic essay forms utilizing description, narration, process description, classification, comparison/contrast, and argument. Because EH 101 is a basic, required course, instructors often find it difficult to generate interest in the classroom. Students with extensive writing experience in high school are bored by a review of basic grammar and essay format. Students who are less well-prepared are confused by the avalanche of rules and forms which instructors are required to cover. Consequently, freshman composition students are apt for different reasons to regard writing assignments as a chore, an unwelcome exercise towards fulfilling a requirement. And, as all instructors know, lack of interest fosters poor writing. Although one way to combat writing fatigue is to allow students to write on topics of their choice, I always specify the topic for the argument essay, the final writing assignment in EH 101. My topic always excites the greatest interest and effort from my students.

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Procedure:

After covering the basic format for an argument essay and discussing several examples from the textbook, I ask students to write down the grade they would like to get in the course and the grade they expect to get. Inevitably, the second grade is lower than the first grade. Classroom discussion reveals that the second grade is generally equivalent to the average grade received on the various essays written up-to-date whereas the first grade is based on more subjective reasoning. With some helpful prodding from me, students begin to articulate the basis for their claims. They discover that progressive improvement, classroom participation, and voluntary attendance at the Writing Laboratory might be considered before an overall course grade is assigned by the instructor. Further discussion elicits the idea that the individual letter grade on an essay can be misleading, for all aspects of an essay are not necessarily of the same quality. For example, failing grades on compositions may result from the consistent inclusion of numerous run-on sentences, although these same compositions might demonstrate increased proficiency in spelling, punctuation, or idea development.

Assignment:

Students are asked to review their written work for the course and note areas of improvement as well as writing weaknesses. Then they are told that their final graded assignment will be an argument essay, the thesis for which will read, "I should receive a [letter grade] for EH 101 because . . . ." This essay must be accompanied by a file of their course work so that I can review the "evidence" upon which they are basing their argument.

Rationale:

The exercise serves a twofold purpose. First, students gain experience in writing an argument essay. Second, students are forced to evaluate their course work objectively, recognizing overall development as well as specific strengths and weaknesses. This self-evaluation results in their acknowledging what purpose EH 101 has served. And, knowing what areas still need to be improved, they bring definite goals and motivation to EH 102. An added benefit for the EH 101 instructor is that rarely do students who have performed such a self-evaluation question the final course grade they do receive.

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